



# NEW MEXICO ENERGY, MINERALS and NATURAL RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **New Mexico Wildfire Awareness Week - March 26 - April 1**

*Prevention and responsibility key to protection against wildfires*

**(Santa Fe, NM)** – New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson has designated March 26 through April 1, 2006 as Wildfire Awareness Week and has signed a proclamation urging New Mexicans to observe the week, be aware of fire danger and take steps to prevent human-caused wildfires.

At a news conference held today at Rio Grande Nature Center State Park in Albuquerque, representatives from many local, state, federal and tribal agencies in charge of protecting New Mexico's lives, property and natural resources from wildfire, commented on the status of New Mexico's fire risk and pointed out how, in recent years, the state has prepared itself for the possibility of catastrophic wildfire.

"We're facing one of the driest years on record but thanks to interagency cooperation and dedication, we're prepared for what could be one of the most active fire seasons we've seen in years," said New Mexico State Forester Arthur "Butch" Blazer. "State Forestry will continue to work with our partners to spread the wildfire prevention message across the state. We are all dedicated to working with communities at risk, training firefighters in wildland fire skills and working toward creating a more healthy forest and watershed ecosystem."

Since January 1, 2006, New Mexico State Forestry has responded to 259 fires that burned more than 202,000 acres. Despite recent moisture this month, high fire activity is expected to continue. Because of that, State Forestry and its partners are at a readiness level usually not seen until late spring during typical fire season years.

This year, during Wildfire Awareness Week and the rest of the fire season, New Mexicans are being asked to "Do your part – Don't let a wildfire start." Interagency partners are asking that all state residents and visitors be mindful of their actions related to fire and obey all fire restrictions that have been imposed on public and private lands.

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The New Mexico State Forestry Division recommends the following actions for state residents, especially those who live in heavily forested or grassy areas, to protect their lives and property against fire:

- Create a 30-foot defensible space zone around the home, removing any trash or woody debris from front and back yards.
- Keep tall growing grasses around homes and structures mowed short.
- Pile firewood and other flammables well away from home and other structures.
- Keep access roads free of debris and vegetation to improve access and escape in case of fire.
- Clean off needles and other debris from roofs and gutters.
- Consider constructing or renovating with fire resistant building materials.
- Prune trees up to 15 feet around structures and remove excess ground fuels such as fallen needles, cones and branches.

The State Forestry Division also recommends:

- Calling the toll-free Fire Restriction Hotline at 1-877-864-6985.
- Only building campfires in areas approved for them such as established campgrounds with fire grills or pits.
- Never leaving a campfire unattended; be sure it is dead out and cold to the touch before leaving the area.
- Never parking vehicles in tall grass or shrubs where fires can start because hot catalytic converters come in contact with dry vegetation.
- Never tossing lit cigarettes out of cars.
- Being aware of smoking restrictions in forested areas.
- Never using fireworks, which are not allowed anywhere on National and State Forests, National Parks and other public lands.

Partners joining the New Mexico State Forestry Division in commemorating Wildfire Awareness Week are: The USDA Forest Service; The Bureau of Land Management; National Park Service; The Southern Pueblos Agency; The New Mexico Department of Public Safety; Albuquerque Fire Department; City of Albuquerque Open Space Division; Bernalillo County Sheriff and Fire Departments; Rio Rancho Department of Public Safety; Corrales Fire Department; Los Ranchos de Albuquerque Fire Department; Sandoval County Fire Department; the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District; Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District; and many others.

For more information on ways to prevent wildfire and practice proper land management, please visit [www.nmforestry.com](http://www.nmforestry.com).

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